

Czech Protestant News

A Bulletin of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren,
the Diaconia of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren,
and the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University

THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF CZECH BRETHREN (ECCB)



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The ECCB originated in the year 1918 through the unification of the Protestant churches of the Lutheran and Reformed confessions which were permitted only after the harsh anti-reformation movement (from 1620 to the introduction of the toleration act of 1781). But, the ECCB has deeper roots in the Czech reformation: in the Utraquist *Hussite Church* (1431-1620) and in the Unity of Brethren Church (1457-1620).

The ECCB has around 130,000 members in more than 260 congregations which are broken down into 14 seniorates (presbyteries) throughout the Czech Republic. At the head of the church is the 6 member Synodal Council, elected for a six-year term of office and is represented by the Synodal Senior and the Synodal Curator.

THE DIACONIA OF THE ECCB



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Diaconia (from the Greek diakonein: to serve) originated in the year 1989 as a special establishment of the church for serving people in need. It continues the work of the old Czech Diaconia (1903-1952). It has 30 centers throughout the entire Czech Republic, which provide the following services: retirement homes for the elderly; care for people with mental and combined disabilities; care for people with health afflictions; health care and nursing services; guidance and community work; work with the homeless and unemployed; work with the Romany.

It is administered by an 11 member board led by a chairperson, who is elected by the Synod of the ECCB for a four-year term of office. The board chooses the director of the Diaconia.

THE PROTESTANT THEOLOGICAL FACULTY OF CHARLES UNIVERSITY (PTF CU)



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The faculty is the successor of the Hussite Faculty (1919-1950: with an interruption between the years 1939-45) and the Comenius Faculty (1950-90). In the year 1990 it was incorporated into Charles University. The administration of the faculty is directed by a dean of faculty and 4 assistant deans, elected for a three-year term of office. The faculty has 8 departments and 3 institutes. For the school year 2001-2002, the faculty has 465 students. The faculty is ecumenically open to all. Pastors of the ECCB receive their theological education here.

EDITORIAL

We live in the world...but, why describe the world in which we live? It is the world of all of us, you know it as well as we. We have the same problems, the same pain and the same dangers which threaten us.

What then can we say to our friends? Perhaps, that we continue to be convinced that to give witness to God's goodness has meaning. The number of Christians in our country is decreasing – according to statistics. But still, it makes sense to testify to our faith in worship and in the church community, for there are people who somehow find a life with God on their own. It makes sense to testify to our faith in social services, not only if it is urgently needed by the weak and disabled, but also by many others, who in the temple of consumption become ill and suddenly realize, that they are alone. It makes sense to testify to faith in intellectual work, because there are plenty of those who, seeking attractive experiences on a thoughtless merry-go-round, lose their orientation and seek a way out.

We work and struggle with our insufficiencies – both external and internal. However, at the same time we are aware that we are not really lacking anything. With horror and sadness we follow the tragedies of our fellow neighbors in the world, and we come to realize our helplessness as well as our obligations. We are relatively rich and safe, but too easily we allow ourselves to be persuaded, that we need still more, and we are unable to sacrifice much.

We seek the best way to express our faith in relation to the community, and we realize once again that the best expression of our faith is through our acts. To give extra time, to pay extra attention, to give of our energies and possibly sometimes even something of our possessions becomes an effective sign that there is an alternative to the culture of consumption and accumulation. We look up to those who lead their lives in this alternative way, but we seldom follow their example.

We find too many reasons for not being satisfied, and we ignore the reasons for being thankful. We are basically sinful people on this earth, no better or worse than others. In spite of this, we dare to give an account of our life and our strengths – an account showing our joys as well as our sorrows - and showing, more or less, our better side. Perhaps it is even good. We all need to encourage and remind ourselves of hope. This is probably why we want to show more what God accomplished among us and how it gives us hope, then to show what we corrupted.

We hope, that our experiences can be useful and hopefully be inspiring and bring you joy.

Yours,

Jindrich Halama, Assistant Dean of the ETF

THE PRAGUE SENIORATE

Blahoslav Hajek



This Seniorate, if we are talking about the number of congregations, is the largest in the ECCB. It has 31 local congregations (including the Prague German speaking congregation). Two thirds of these congregations are in the capital city, and the other third are located outside of Prague. Although this Seniorate as a whole is slightly heterogeneous, it doesn't have any serious problems. Even the congregations outside of Prague feel close to the capital, as a large amount of the members commute there to work.

There is only one traditional, rural congregation from the period of toleration, but what was said above applies to this congregation as well. The other congregations in this Seniorate originated later, and their own traditions were created in the 20th century. This also applies to the majority of the Prague congregations. While the historical core of Protestants following the period of toleration originated in the rural areas of the Czech lands, the first Prague Czech Protestant church was not created until several decades later. Originally there were two congregations, one Lutheran and one Reformed.

Not until the period of the 1930's to the 1950's were other congregations gradually created from these two original congregations, and so only since the 1960's have there been 20 congregations in Prague. A characteristic of these new congregations formed from the two original is that they evidently did not separate themselves according to confession (from the Lutheran Salvator congregation – Lutheran churches, from the Reformed Clement congregation – reformed churches), but rather according to location (Salvator - west of the river Vltava, Clement - east of the Vltava). Confessional specification no longer carried any weight for them and all of these new congregations believed themselves to be Protestant congregations of the Czech Brethren.

Today, these congregations are mainly composed of educated, middle class members. We have neither rich entrepreneurs nor a public of politically influential circles. At the same time, we do not have many manual laborers or those without professional qualifications. This, then affects our form of proclamation in the church, which first addresses the intellectual and educated classes. Also, the content of congregational meetings, programs and discussions are frequently connected to educational cultivation. However, recently many have felt that this form of communication is somewhat one sided and doesn't address the young generation very well. Perhaps this is connected with the remarkable change in the form of worship, which has been displayed in the last few years. The majority of congregations have introduced

an order of liturgical elements into their worship services, which did not exist before, even though it corresponds well to traditional Patristics, as well as to pre-Reformation churches. Also, the congregations are growing through events outside the normal worship services by appealing to richer forms of communication: namely music and theatre.

A specific characteristic of the Prague congregations of the ECCB is that parishioners no longer attend the closest parish, as they tended to do in the past. As a rule, faithful members become so closely bound to their congregation that even when they move to a different part of the city they continue to attend the same congregation. This can even be called insubordination, because the church order presumes that a faithful Christian is a member of the closest congregation to where one lives. However, every congregation has the right to their own specifications and every one of their faithful members is already bound by so many personal ties to their own congregation, that it would be difficult for them to leave it.

But this fact is closely connected with another less desirable phenomenon: the congregations are also considerably isolated from one another. Ten years ago, the faithful core of the churches was solid, and if one congregation planned a special event, members from the neighboring congregations also attended with enthusiasm. This does not happen any more, and the urban congregations suffer from what is the characteristic anonymous, urban way of life. People who live in close vicinity to one another, are, at the same time, strangers. This does not occur within the individual congregations, but rather in the communication between congregations. Probably in the



Seniorates where the congregations are separated by many kilometers, the congregations know more about one another than they do in Prague. Even the Seniorate meetings in Prague suffer from this phenomenon.

The Prague Seniorate is faced with the challenge of these pressing situations of changing times. How do we hold our ground before God's face in situations where we can't lean upon the experiences of our father? This is the question we face every day. But, we are allowed to believe, that the congregations will fulfill their calling and are places witnessing to God's love. Many of the faithful members of these congregations definitely help substantially in this matter, so that the hope of the Gospels of Christ would be distinctively voiced in a society which is contemporary, and in many regards broken and spiritually seeking.

photos

top left: Benesov church of Prague seniorate

Bottom right: youth group meeting in Liben congregation of Prague 8

THE NEW LAW ABOUT THE CHURCH IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Pavel Vychopen, Director of the Diaconia

Those individuals who closely follow the life of our country know that we are not lacking in hot topics. The most burning issue today, from our point of view, is incontestably the fact, that the Parliament of the Czech Republic, at the end of last year, passed a new law pertaining to freedom of religion and the position of the church in society. It is a bad law, basically worse than the previous, which was accepted shortly after the velvet revolution in the year 1991. According to the

“It is restrictive, and it is implicit that the intention is to limit the work of the church within society and to exercise control over it with the help of government bureaucracies. The most cardinal issue raised by this new law is the narrow concept of the church, which is pushed into the area known technically as “cult”. Church activities are narrowed into only the area of Christian faith and the organization of worship. The state claims the right to designate what are church institutions, and to delimit what they can and can’t do.”

opinion of many, it contradicts not only the Proclamation of Basic Rights and Freedoms, but also the Constitution of the Czech Republic. It is restrictive, and it is implicit that the intention is to limit the work of the church within society and to exercise control over it with the help of government bureaucracies. The most cardinal issue raised by this new law is the narrow concept of the church, which is pushed into the area known technically as “cult”. Church activities are narrowed into only the area of Christian faith and the organization of worship. The state claims the right to define church institutions, and to delimit what they can and can’t do. And in this high-handed fashion to even abolish them without showing the side of the will of the church. If we

are unable to change the wording of this law by way of complaint to the constitutional court, or through its amendment, it will have a lasting effect on the life of the church in our country. I will try to explain this impact from the Diaconia’s point of view, and I will base this on two levels.

The first is a practical level. The fact is that the new law doesn’t permit the church to directly establish and run its own health and social facilities. This change will call for a number of practical measures to be taken in order to preserve the continuity of the work of the Diaconia. Primarily, this means it will be necessary to change the legal form of the Diaconia. At this point it is too early to say which form will be chosen in the end. We are considering all the pros and cons of individual models, and eventually their combination. In any case, what we hope to end up with will be a model which will

be the closest to what we have now, making it possible for the Diaconia to be closely connected to the church.

A change in the legal form brings up a number of questions, none of which are easy to answer. For example, how will it be with the legal succession of this new subject? The transitional provision of this new law does not sufficiently address this problem. A clear transformation to this provision is missing here. The question is, whether this is an accident, an oversight of an overworked legislator, or, whether it is intentional. Will we first have to liquidate the Diaconia according to the current ruling, or only transfer everything into a new institutional entity? Will it come to the taxation of everything? And, what will happen to the property, which belongs to the church? Will we have to re-negotiate all contracts necessary for ensuring our operations? At the same time, will it also mean changing the conditions of the contracts? And, what if we are unable to renew some of the contracts? This new legal form will have an influence on the Diaconia’s existence in terms of its management, and probably also on its economic and other mechanisms.

And now we are at the second level, which we shall call the spiritual level. Will the Diaconia be able to successfully maintain its ties to the church? In the deep connection between the Diaconia and the church, which is above all visible on the level of the local congregations in relation to the individual centers of the Diaconia, we were perceived, and continue to be perceived, as a major avenue for the church to present itself in the community through the form of practical services of love by helping those who are most in need. At the same time, this is also a reality that works inside the church, which has come to realize through the every day agenda of the centers of the Diaconia, that the Diaconia belongs to the primary mission of the church and that it is impossible to undertake it only partially, or, to delegate it as a special institution working for and operating within the church. Won’t this loosening of the pertinent relationship between the church and the Diaconia bring about an exodus of a number of co-workers? We are already getting signals from some people, who are considering whether they will continue working in cooperation with the Diaconia after it will no longer be under the direct management of the church. At the same time, in the countries surrounding us, a completely opposite trend is apparent. Currently, we are seeing a big struggle in our sister churches to our west to get the Diaconia back into the life of the church and its reflexes. I think that this struggle, in one way or another, also awaits us, whether it will be after we have already defended the remaining Diaconia in its present relationship to the church, or, whether we will eventually create new relations to the church in our relative independence.

But the new law does not bring only complications and unpleasanties. It is also a big challenge for all of us, so that we would take this as an opportunity to transform the church, as well as the Diaconia, in a struggle to move forward. Those, who take the church and its Diaconia seriously, surely will take up the reins and accept this appeal. I would like to thank all of those who have already acted, offering their strengths and skills in an attempt to solve this difficult situation. I will end with this well-known Czech phrase: you know who your real friends are in times of trouble.

The Fourth Session of the Synod of the ECCB

SYNOD

The Synod of the ECCB was held on May 23-26, 2002, in the Vinohrady congregation of Prague and addressed several issues.

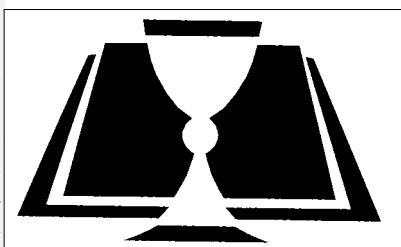


The Synod delegates first turned their attention to the repeated debate of *economic and budget issues*, as well as to the *new salary scale for pastors*, in which changes of the state appropriations for pastors' salaries is being considered (these salaries on the whole are still on a lower level than the average salary in our country) and in which possible ways of additional coverage of wage needs is also being considered.

There was a discussion on *what congregations expect of pastors and what pastors expect of congregations*. Materials will be distributed to the congregations and

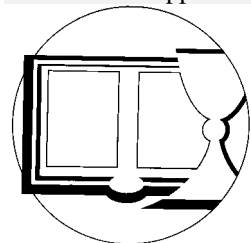
presbyteries for additional discussions. A debate on the questions of the relationship of Jews to Christians was concluded through the acceptance of the ECCB's position in these matters.

Significant attention was given to the choice of *our church logo*, which would represent our church particularly in relation to our surroundings, on internet pages and in the entire ecumenical area. Discussions showed that opinions on the symbols used in the logo are quite varied. Questions on this matter will continue to be addressed through wider internal church discussions, as a decision on the logo was postponed until the next session of the Synod.



The Synod closed with the acceptance of the text *A statement on the questions of Czech-German relations*, which is quite often discussed these days within the entire society.

At the Synod we also invited guests from our partner churches in England, France, the Netherlands, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Scotland, Slovakia and the United States, as well as from the Protestant organizations of the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Conference of European Churches. These guests greeted the Synod and voiced their support of us in the difficult position of the church in Diaspora in our country. We expect that next year individuals from Germany will be invited.



Synod discussions often went long into the night. In the end, an additional, special session of the Synod will be held on September 8, 2002 due to the number of problems and questions needing attention. This session will end the election term of the current 30th Synod. On May 22-25, 2003 the

first session of the 31st Synod will be held, in which the elections of the new Synodal Council will be held.

We all met for a closing worship service with communion on Sunday at the Vinohrady congregation. We were grateful, that we could all gather together and freely discuss and make decisions.

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* above: options for the new church logo of the ECCB

REPORTS ON THE SYNOD BY CZECH PRESS AGENCIES

Protestants called for the courage to apologize and reconcile

Prague, May 25 (Czech Press) – The Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren appealed to the Czech society for a true picture of past Czech-German relations and to acknowledge its own faults. Today, elected representatives at the Synod of the second largest Christian Church in the Czech Republic took a stand on their previous position in relation to the displacement of Germans following the war. Through the acceptance of a text, they expressed the conviction that the implementation of the principle of collective guilt at that time weighs upon the Czech nation's conscience.

"I found in the decree of president Beneš a horrible concept of collective guilt," Pavel Smetana, Synodal Senior of the ECCB, told the press. According to him, Czech Brethren members now challenge the Czech society to have the courage to apologize and reconcile.

"At the same time, we distance ourselves from the abuse of Czech-German relations in the current political games," Smetana added.

In the statement of the Synod, it is pointed out that German citizens admitted to the guilt of the German nation many times. "It is also our task, so that we, as a responsible nation, conscious of our humanitarian and democratic traditions, would see and admit truthfully to our own guilt," is found in the text.

According to the statement, in the national interest without question "belongs truthfully admitting to one's past, not only to the good, but also to the bad." According to the members of the Czech Brethren, the nations who were able to do this, deserve the respect of others.

The ECCB expects ecumenical relationships to intensify

Prague, May 25 (Czech Press) – Czech members of the ECCB expect from their pastors and congregations a deepening of ecumenical relationship and a firmer community.

A sociological study, which was initiated among the members of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, further stated, that Protestants don't want to give up their social work and that the congregations don't have to only close themselves up in their prayer rooms.

The subject of what the congregations and pastors mutually expect from one another was

The Fourth Session of the Synod of the ECCB

addressed at the Synod in Prague of this, the second largest Christian church in the Czech Republic. According to their representatives, it is necessary to find new models of church work. Discussions held in the general assembly as well as in committees, debated the content of large, prepared texts. According to the Synod though, it is still too early for a conclusion.

According to the last census the number of members in our church has decreased, but the number of active people participating in worship services and other congregational activities has not decreased," Pavel Smetana, Synodal Senior of the ECCB told the press today. Statistics show approximately 130,000 members in the ECCB.

THE ECCB CRITICIZED THE NEW CHURCH LAW AND STOOD BEHIND THE DIACONIA

Prague, May 26 (Czech Press) The Synod of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, which finished its session today in Prague with a worship service, concerned with the position of the church within the community, expressed its criticism of the new church law and stood behind the Diaconia (the ECCB's institution for social services).

The ECCB is of the opinion that the church would be "practically pushed into only the confines of its church and prayer rooms." If the Constitutional court, in which an appeal is held, does not vote differently, it will not be possible for the church to found and continue the operations of the Diaconia, educational facilities or other institutions. According to the conclusion of the Synod, advances in the Czech Republic would be reverted.

The law, which was passed at the end of last year, cast doubt upon the church's right for the registration of social institutions, and this is why the delegates of the Synod considered the need to confirm that "practical services of love" is an inseparable part of the declaration of faith.

"The understanding for the social responsibilities of the church from the side of the government is very limited," Pavel Smetana, Synodal Senior told the press.

By way of example, Smetana referred to the situation in Valašské Meziříčí, where the church is building a hospice center for the terminally ill, and to the difficulties they have obtaining the promised money from the state.

The opinion was expressed, that the Social Democratic Party(CSSD) and the Civic Democratic Party(ODS) have already given up hope of gaining the votes of Czech Christians. "They anticipate that above all the majority of the Catholic church would support the People's Party anyway," he pointed out.

AN INVITATION TO THE CONGREGATIONS OF THE ECCB The Relationship of Jews to Christians

The Synod invites the congregations of the ECCB, to continue in the dialogue about their relationship to Judaism from the view of the Biblical witness, and to think about questions and standpoints expressed in this statement, as well as in similar documents of Churches and world church alliances from recent time. We are thankful for opportunities where frequent meetings with Jews occur on the congregational level and where respect and solidarity with Jewish communities is shown, or where attention and reverence is paid to Jewish memorials and historical sights. We suggest to follow in the steps of our sister churches from abroad which introduced to their church calendar a celebration of a Sunday devoted to Israel (for example in September in proximity to significant Jewish holidays).

CZECH PROTESTANT NEWS

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A STATEMENT BY THE SYNOD OF THE ECCB ON CURRENT CZECH-GERMAN RELATIONS

Recently attention has once again been given both in the Czech Republic as well as abroad to the post-war banishment and displacement of Germans and some Hungarians from Czechoslovakia. Some people in the Czech Republic, as well as in the neighboring nations, use this sad chapter of history for their own goals in the context of pre-election debates and during the self promotion of particular group interests. We are worried about this inflaming of grudges among neighboring nations.



These events occurred in Czechoslovakia immediately following the criminal war, which Germany started six years earlier and brought suffering and death to millions of people. This undoubtedly can be interpreted as a reaction to the Munich agreement and the German occupation. It took place in an atmosphere where a renewed coexistence with those who helped to break up the pre-war republic did not seem possible. In spite of the violence which was committed by those being expelled, the mass humiliation, expropriation, expulsion and displacement of the population of 3 million Germans which was

committed by the Czechs also cost the lives of dozens of thousands of people. Yes, even the pure application of the principle of collective guilt burdens our national memory. It is our task, that we, as a responsible nation, conscious of our humanitarian and democratic traditions, would see and admit truthfully to our own blame. To the "national interest" belongs without a doubt admitting truthfully to one's past, and not only to the good, but also to the bad. The nations who were able to do this, deserve the respect of others.

Delegates of the 4th session of the 30th Synod of the ECCB

OTHER NEWS FROM THE SYNODAL COUNCIL

Help for Afghanistan

In view of the tremendous need in Afghanistan, the Synodal Council decided to transfer 10,000 Swiss francs to the HEKS organisation (Relief Organisation of the Protestant Churches in Switzerland) for use as aid to refugees in Afghanistan. The Synodal Council had good reasons for choosing to channel this aid through HEKS, as HEKS has supported the ECCB for several decades, and the two partners have come to trust each other. The donation had a very welcome side-effect, as Glückskette, the organisation for aid in catastrophe situations set up by the Swiss Radio and Television Institutions, made the 10,000 francs up to 50,000 francs by donating four times as much to the same cause.

Cheb said farewell to Kathrin Frowein

Kathrin Frowein, a junior minister of the Bavarian Church, has completed a period of three years' ministry in the town of Cheb/Eger and the Western Bohemian Seniorate. At a farewell ceremony in Cheb, the congregation, the Seniorate and the Synodal Council expressed their thanks for her ministry of reconciliation and good neighbourly relations. On the Bavarian side, thanks were transmitted from the

Bayreuth District Deanery and the Adult Education Centre in Bad Alexandersbad. During her time in Cheb, Kathrin Frowein had made a considerable contribution to mutual understanding between Czechs and Germans: through her preaching, her teaching in the school, and countless meetings with young people and adults. A particular feature of her activity was her work with Romany children in the Fiducia youth club. In this newsletter we would also like to express our thanks to Kathrin Frowein and to the Bavarian Church, which made this special ministry possible.

Christian Link leaves Prague

Christian Link, a junior minister of the Church in Baden (Germany), will leave Prague in July and return to the Church in Baden. This marks the end of his three-year practical training placement abroad, which he has carried out in the Ecumenical Department of the Synodal Council with great success. His principal task has been responsibility for groups of very different kinds that have visited Prague and the ECCB during that time. During these three years he has been responsible for about 100 groups, preparing and organising the programme for them and accompanying them in Prague. He was a popular guide for the groups,

especially on walks taking in places connected with Jan Hus in the Old Town in Prague. Other areas of his work included teaching German at the Synodal Council and the Theology Faculty, helping to prepare and send out this newsletter, translating and correcting the German in various texts and books, and organising Czech participation at the Kirchentag and the project "A fortnight in a German congregation". He was responsible for preparing the consultation with the Church in Baden about prospects for cooperation in the future. Other regular features of his activity were involvement in the German-speaking congregation in Prague, where he preached once a month, and studying and assisting with seminars at the Protestant Theological Faculty. On 9 June Christian Link and his wife Minne Bley will say farewell to Prague during the service of the German-speaking congregation. In this newsletter, too, we would like to say a big thank you to Christian Link for his tireless commitment to Czech-German understanding. Thanks, too, to the Church in Baden and the German National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation, who made these three years in Prague possible.
gfr

Josef B. Souček (1902-1972)*Petr Pokorný, professor of New Testament at the Protestant Theological Faculty*

In May of this year, it will be exactly 100 years since the birth, and in September, 30 years since the death of Josef B. Souček, doctor of theology, professor at the Protestant Theological Faculty in Prague, bearer of the Order of Merit in memoriam, receiver of honorary doctorates from universities in Aberdeen and Basil. The fact that J. B. Souček is a key person to Czech Protestantism, who exceeded his limits, bears much more weight than these awards.

If we are to understand him, we must realize, that as a professor of the New Testament he connected in his method of work, as well as in the layout of his discipline as a whole, elements of German research and Anglo-Saxon traditions. From the first tradition, he drew perseverance of thought and methods of historical critique, and from the second, linguistic methods and never-ending questions. His theology was first inspired by Karl Barth, and later also by the theology of the Vatican II Council. But above all his theology came from the Czech tradition and from discussions with professors Josef L. Hromádka and Emanuel Rádl. Souček was also connected with the work of the Prague linguistic circle, and from the 50's, he had intense discussions with Jan Patočka. All of his works are really quite diverse, from a Greek dictionary of the New Testament, to his pioneer work on the ecumenical translation of the New Testament, from the engaging biblical commentaries up to the reasoning about the concept of nation, to works about Czech-German relations, as well as theology and philosophy works. His reflections on the situation and mission of the church in the socialist regime form a special characteristic of his work. They were not able to be published until after the year 1989 (he had sent them anonymously to the World Council of Churches in Geneva after February 1948),



but readers could read their basic message both here, as well as abroad through his exegetical contribution "The Church and the world according to 1 Peter" (German 1960, Czech 1961). It was a theological program for churches under pressure; the church has to bear the distinct witness of the gospels, but it can not play the political role of opposition.

In the 60's he gave much of his energy to dialogues with Catholic theologians and laity, which he organized under the patronage of professor Hromádka in the theological seminary seminars known as the so-called Jiráčské Thursdays, and later the Marxist-Christian dialogue led by professor Milan Machovec from the philosophical faculty.

The deepest level connecting the different areas of his work is his own systematic theological and philosophical contributions. Although not in numerous amounts, Souček devoted significant studies to the reflection on the basic problems of society from the viewpoint of faith.. He did not write any monograph about this subject, but even this modest form of expression belongs to the nature of his solution for current questions. His solution is rooted in his conviction that the foundation is a positive creation of an alternative environment, in which the church should be at the center, but culture belongs, in the broadest sense of the term, to the church's field of vision. This is why in the most difficult period of normalization, after the suppression of the Prague Spring of 1968, he focused his strengths on an ecumenical translation of the Bible, in which he also found encouragement for his troubled spirit. Succeeding generations will newly discover his works and interpret them for their times. It will be well worth their while.

Professor Dr. Josef Smolik*Blahoslav Hájek*

On March 27 of this year, Professor Dr. Josef Smolik turned 80. For many years he taught practical theology at the theological faculty, but he reached far beyond this narrow, specific discipline. He was tied to the church his whole life and he accepted its lot, as well as its calling for "peace on earth."

In his first constructive years he started from the idea that the core of God's place in the world is the congregation of his followers, in whose service to the word and to the sacraments is the real presence of Christ, in spite of the transformation of all ages. He gradually began to explicitly distinguish, that responsibility for the community is also carried by the Christian church, and this is why it is required to be committed in solidarity and love towards our fellow human beings. Let this then contribute to the struggle for human rights, but always with a reference to the truth,

which is above us. He was then fairly committed to ecumenism. For many years he was a member of the executive committee of the Ecumenical Council of Churches and worked on the commission for Faith and Order. He was also the dean of the theological faculty, and it was his task to painfully carry the responsibility during periods of difficult, social upheavals.

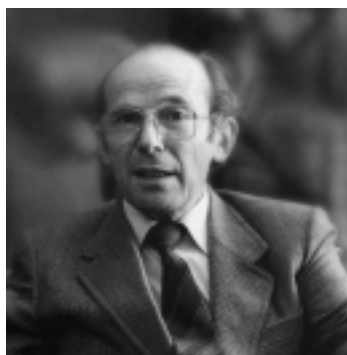
He wrote a number of text books, he designed with his colleagues a liturgical Agenda for the church and he wrote hundreds of articles for Czech as well as international journals. He untiringly continues in his publication works, and from the position of his extensive education and conscientious exegesis, he helps lead many Christians in today's world. When the theological faculty and the wider public celebrated his birthday, he gave a lecture on "The Old Testament – a book of Jews and Christians." He has never wavered in his confidence in the reign of the resurrected Christ above all other transformations of this age.

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PROFESSOR DR. J.M. LOCHMAN

Blahoslav Hájek



On April 3, Professor Dr. J.M. Lochman celebrated his 80th birthday. As the most significant current Czech Protestant theologian in the world today he taught systematic theology at the Prague Theological Faculty until the year 1967. Then, following a year of teaching at Union Theological Seminary in New York and following additional invitations to reputable European Universities, he became a permanent professor of systematic theology in Basil when the Czechoslovakian government at that time did not allow him an extended stay abroad. He worked there from 1969 until 1992, and for 2 terms he also became rector of the university. In addition to his work there, he gave innumerable guest speeches and periodical lectures at dozens of universities and conferences in all 5 continents. His largest work is around 2 dozens volumes, and his short pieces, articles and published lectures and sermons number in the thousands.

His interest, and the interest of his many audiences and readers, is mainly attracted to the theme in which biblical testimony extends beyond the Christian realm and meets with the spiritual base for the present day culture. Characteristic of this are the titles of some of his works: The Spiritual Heritage of the Czech Revival, Theology and Philosophy, Theology and Religion, Dogmatics in Dialogue, the Reign of Christ in the Secularized World, Christ or Prometheus, The Significance of Theology for the Church and Society, The Significance of Historical Events for Ethical Solutions, Dedication to Truth and Tolerance, Man within the whole Creation. He didn't even steer away from the reinterpretation of traditional Christian themes: an interpretation of the 10 Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the Apostle's Creed, and the intent of Christian holidays.

It is no accident, that Lochman lived and worked in Bohemia to his middle age. Here, in the 1960's there was, in the post-war prematurely secularized community, an exceptional living ground for dialogue with living Marxism, which grew up towards the spiritually and politically more open era. This also gave the possibility for a larger world view and a more sensitive attention to the so-called third world. To this was added the beginning of European ecumenical dialogues, incensed by the council of Vatican II. The Prague Theological Faculty became the center for many unprecedented meetings. Lochman, equipped in these matters, set out in the world armed as a proficient and diligent scholar, and with a remarkable sharpness and memory was received with attention and curiosity. He was probably invited to every place in the world, where there was a struggle for contact between Biblical messages and non-Christian cultures and ideas. He had the opportunity to contribute to the uncovering of the deep basis of the unique Christian message and reformation, and he also substantially helped to increase awareness about the Czech Reformation. His concept of Gods' grace enriches the spiritual emptiness of our technically developed civilization and comes forth as help towards the reconciliation of civilizations and builds spiritual foundations for the coming of globalization.

Prof. Lochman is unbelievably brisk, which is perhaps based on his love for sports (not a typical hobby for theologians). For more than 20 years he was for the Czech official authorities of the period of the so called "real socialism" a persona non grata (an unwanted person). But since the 1990's he has been a welcomed and frequent guest in his home land. His original theological faculty prepared a meeting in his honor to thank him, and the Charles University awarded him with other honors. He gave a lecture: Theology and the University – a contribution to academic spirituality.

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